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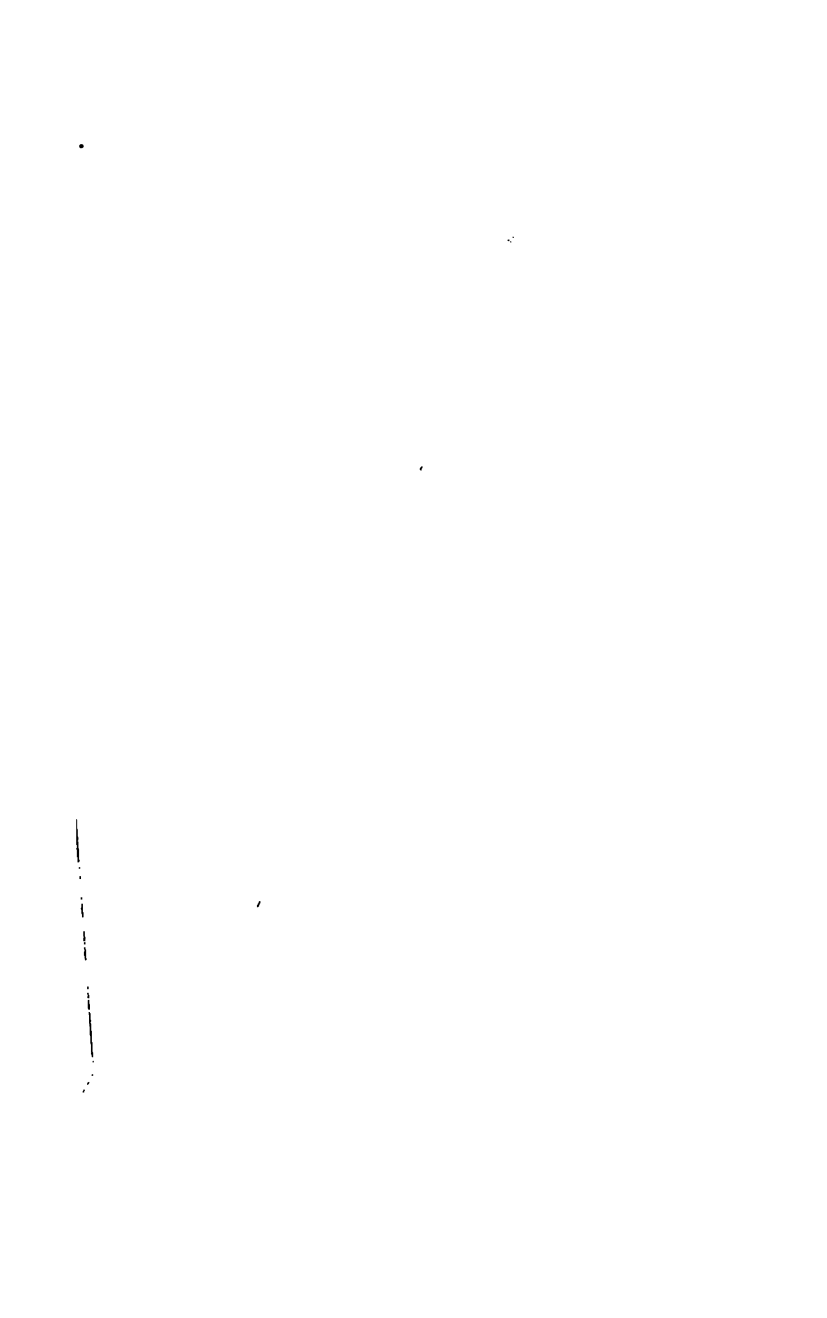
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ESTHER

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1.



Presented
To the Corporation of Harvard College
Cambridge N. S. A.

by the Author

Sattacato (Ayrshire)

November 1884

DEC 2 1884

ESTHER

ESTHER

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

BY

ALEXANDER WINTON BUCHAN,

AUTHOR OF "THE SONG OF REST."

Next showered into my fantasy a shape
As of one crucified, whose visage spake
Fell rancour, malice deep, wherein he died ;
And round him Ahasuerus the great king,
Esther his bride, and Mordecai the just,
Blameless in word and deed.

—DANTE.

Osrick. How is't, Laertes?

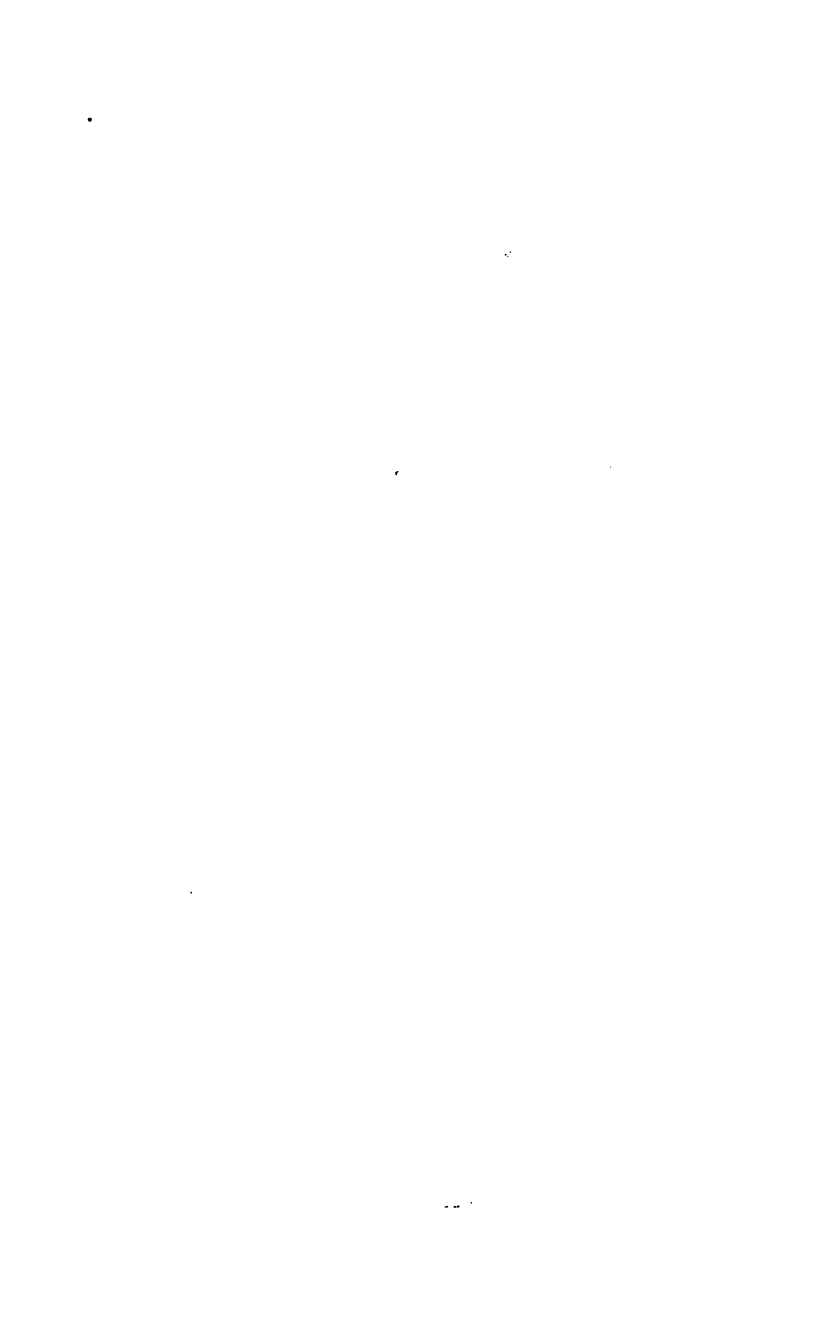
Laertes. Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osrick ;
I am justly killed with mine own treachery.

—SHAKESPEARE.

²GLASGOW

THOMAS MURRAY AND SON

1873



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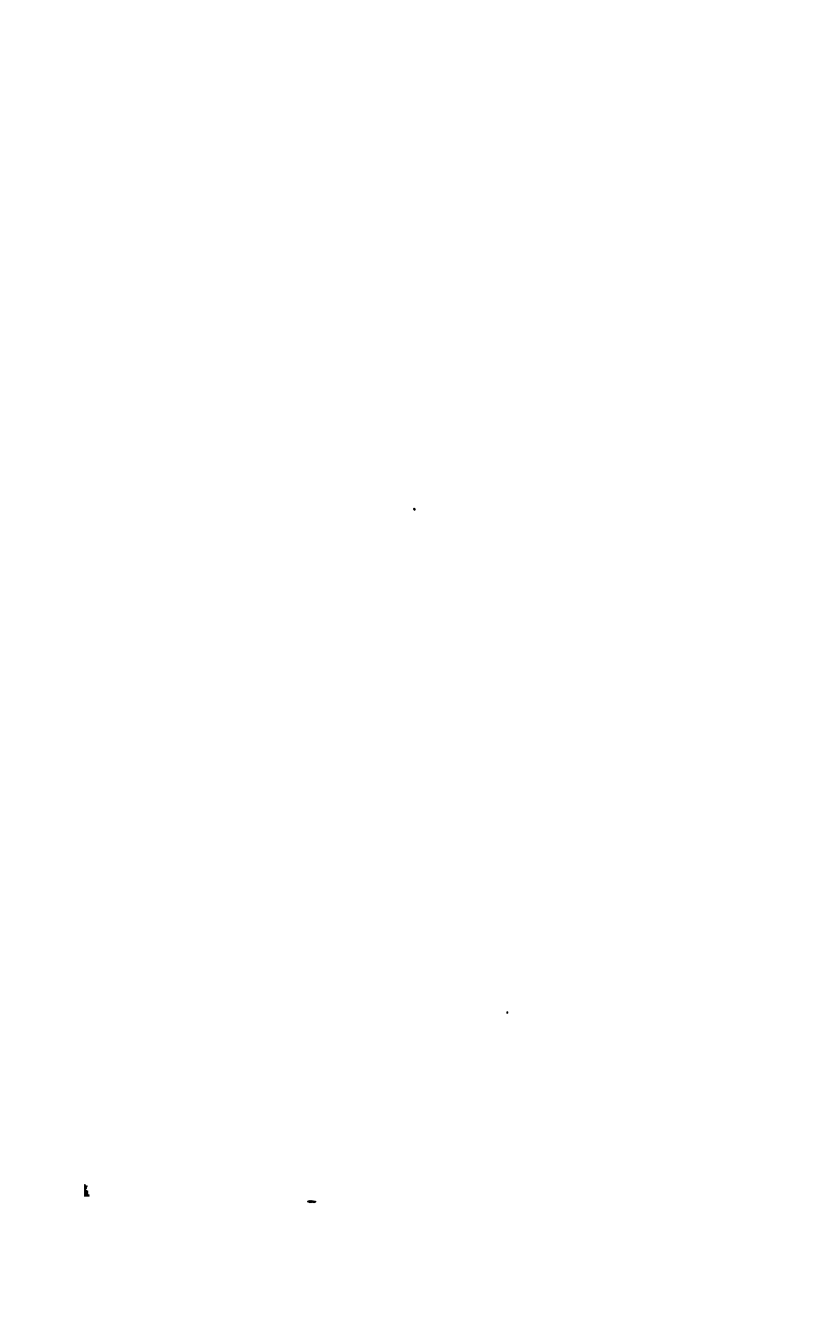
by the Author

Saltcoats (Ayrshire)

November 1884

DEC 2 1884

ESTHER



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

NAMED IN THE SCRIPTURE HISTORY.

AHASUERUS, the King.

MORDECAI, the Jew, cousin of Queen Esther.

HAMAN, the Agagite, vizier.

PARSHANDATHA, } sons of Haman and Zeresh.
DAHLON, }

MEMUCAN, }
SHETHAR, } Princes of Medo-Persia.
ADMATHA, }

SHAASHEGAZ, }
HARBONA, } Chamberlains of the Palace.
HEGE, }
HATACH, }

ESTHER, the Queen chosen in Vashti's stead.

ZERESH, wife of Haman.

NOT NAMED IN THE SCRIPTURE HISTORY.

NATHAN and LEVI, Jews, friends of Mordecai.

SERAIHAH, an aged Jewish priest.

EZRA, a young Jewish scribe.

ZELAH, a handmaiden of the Queen.

The SCENE lies in Sushan, capital of the ancient Persian Empire.

ESTHER.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—AN ANTECHAMBER IN THE PALACE.

Enter SHAASHGAZ, HARBONA, HEGE.

SHAASHGAZ.

Her gentle manner is her chiefest charm.

HARBONA.

In that, I own, Esther bears off the prize;
But stirring times make even the gentlest bold,
And boldness is with sternness close allied.
Yet, to have sense to one's true dignity,
And nerve to stand upon it, ought to make
External beauty more attractive still,
As showing us a soul encased within,
Worthy the casket, howsoever rare.
Poor Vashti wore the crown when the loud notes
Of war preparatory 'gainst the Greek,
Shook the whole air, and men's hearts were strung up
To such wild play of passion, that small cause
Sufficed to make them overleap the bounds

Of moderation. Rigidly she stood,
Too rigidly, perhaps, in the blast's teeth,
And so she fell.

HEGE.


To the comparison
Between the former and our present queen,
I cannot speak as both of you can do;
For, as you know, 'twas not my luck to serve
In Vashti's court. But this I must declare,—
Of all the maidens given into my hands
From whom the king might duly choose a queen
In Vashti's stead, Esther, by her sweet ways,
And soft, low voice, won most my eager care
To further her promotion to the throne.

SHAASHGAZ.

Esther securely sits in the king's regard;
Of that we all are 'ware. And it is well
It is so. For beneath her placid sky
Sunshine illumines the royal countenance,
Where tempest used to rage. I do not grudge
To bear her messages to Mordecai,
And his to her, although some risk is run
In doing so.

HARBONA.

Nor grudge I to perform
Her gentle will. Albeit I have called



To mind the fall of Vashti and its cause;
It is for sake of Vashti's memory,
Which I would ever honour and defend,
And not that I from good Queen Esther's worth
Would take by implication even a grain.

SHAASHGAZ.

No, no! We do not gather from your words
Aught of such purpose. He who in the hour
When cloud and sorrow overtake his friend,
But clings to him with tenderer loyalty,
Has just the soul in which no spot is found
For malice to strike root.

HEGE.

Thou speak'st the truth!
And if the queen's life do as sweetly flow
As both of you desire, Hege will have
No sigh to heave, as Esther will have none.

HARBONA.

In judging thus you do me rightly judge;
But to a weakness in remembering
The former queen, and speaking of her fate,
To you I do confess. For in that year
Of the king's reign, the third, when all the power
Of Media and Persia, princes too,
And nobles of the provinces besides,
Feasted in Shushan here for six full moons;

And then the people all, both small and great,
I' the royal city feasted seven whole days;
And on the seventh day, when the king, whose heart
Being with the free wine merry, gave command
To the seven chamberlains, to bring the queen,
With the crown royal, that he might display
To all the beauty of her form and face,
Unscreened except by Nature's covering;—
I was the chamberlain who spoke the word
Of the king's pleasure to the unhappy queen.

The play of feeling o'er that noble face:
Astonishment, alarm, grief, pride, and shame,
The offspring and the prop of modesty,
Chasing each other, as a hounded pack
A slender, timorous deer,—can I forget?

Methinks I see her yet, and hear her word
Of answer given with martyr energy,
But meekly,—“Say unto my lord, the king,
Vashti cannot obey the king in this!”
Which word, persisted in, cost Vashti dear,—
Her crown, but not her name.

SHAASHGAZ.

The king himself,
As I have heard, after his wrath was spent,
Grieved for her fall, and hurried the war apace,
That he might drown his pitying regrets
In the loud camp. Nay, not till Esther's light *

* Esther is a Persian word, and means a star.

Fell on the king, which happ'd what time he came
Back from the war, did he forget his loss
In Vashti's deposition. Now, in sooth,
Esther reigns solely, and she reigns for good.

HEGE.

'Twas a good day, when from her native place
Babylon, she came with Mordecai to this
The royal city, and the officers,
Gathering the fair young virgins, found her out,
Like a sweet floweret wet with morning dew,
Within the shelving of a little dell,
And brought her to the palace, where to-day
She sheds a healing fragrance all around.

SHAASHGAZ.

Her love for Mordecai, and his for her,
Are marvellous and touching. He appears,
Day after day, when from his post relieved,
Before the court of the Women's House to learn
Of Esther's welfare. Often do we speak.

HARBONA.

That Mordecai's grave face and honest voice
Make many friends. But yet I wonder much
That his disclosure of the wicked plot
Of Bigthana and Teresh, to avenge
The fall of Vashti on the king's own life,
Has not been followed by reward. Some hand

Of envy bars his path. Haman, perhaps,
Now vizier, and the great man with the king,
Will see to this.

HEGE.

I do not know for that ;
Haman is chief of all the princes now ;
He wears the king's ring. That we all shall know,
And soon, if I have rightly scanned the man.
But time will prove. Yet we do plainly see
All eyes in the court look not on Mordecai
So favourably as we. [Exeunt.

SCENE II.—A RETIRED SPOT NEAR THE PALACE.

MORDECAI *alone.*

MORDECAI.

The land of exile is the land of tears !
Far, far from thee, Jerusalem, we dwell :
Jerusalem, the longing of our eyes,
The life-spring of our hearts, our deathless cry !
Oh, God of Abraham ! our father, blessed
Of Thee, the Almighty, be not Thou far off,
That grief is near us in this foreign land,
Which knows Thee not, and where we captives are.
Thou smitest sore,—we open not our mouth ;

But yet thy flock, and for our fathers' sake,
Dear unto Thee we are. Spare not the rod,
For we have sinned, and mercy's voice itself
Calls loud for justice, to inflict the pain
Our madness, our ingratitude deserved,
When from Thy name we took the glory due,
And to dumb idols gave it. But, alas!
We utterly must fade beneath Thy stroke,
If Thou dost not through Him, the appointed seed,
(Whose day, oh! may it even now be nigh!)
That shall deliver Israel at last,
And lift our heads 'bove all our enemies,—
Give grace to us, that we may bow ourselves
In sackcloth and in ashes penitent,
So Thou mayest say,—It is enough, and take
Thy hand from off us, and for strokes give peace,
Even peace beneath our own fig-tree and vine,
Within the borders of that sacred land
Promised, and to our fathers given of old.

But, by the way that seemeth good to Thee,
Not our wrong way, conduct our painful steps.
We have rebelled; so, if Thou do but lead
Us back to Thy embrace, and to the land
That flows with milk and honey, we will bless
And praise Thy name, howe'er that way may be
Circuitous, and hard, and strangely marked.

Look on my brethren in this land of tears,
Father, Almighty, with a tender eye.
Let not Thy vengeance on their tottering faith

Descend to slay,—but 'gainst that tottering faith
Place in the scale their sorrow and distress.
Yet not that with impunity they may
Think slightingly of Thee, and of Thy ways
Unto their fathers, in the days of old,
And of Thy many gracious words and acts
Unto themselves, do I prefer my prayer;
But that Thou mayest not, in their despair,
Cast off thy chosen, but rather soothe their woe,
And breathe into their sinking hearts the strength
Of penitence, and faith, and hope, and love.

And, Father, let me pray for her Thou gav'st
To be a daughter to me, and didst raise
Me up in room of her dear parents both,
Whom death removed, when she was but a child:
Oh! bless her, shield her, as her perilous place,
And loneliness and weakness, do require,
According to the measure of the love
Thou bearest to Thine own! For all the joy
She gave my heart in that I saw her soul,
Day after day, expanding to receive,
Through Thy free Spirit, Thy most blessed truth,—
With thankful lips, I bless and praise Thy name!

[*Enter NATHAN and LEVI.*

NATHAN *and* LEVI.

The Lord bless Mordecai! The Lord him bless!

MORDECAI.

The Lord be with you both ! The God of heaven
His chosen folk defend, and cheer, and guide !
And now, dear friends, what words have ye for us,—
What words to strengthen or forewarn ? Alas !
That we are far from Palestina's coasts !
But, our God made the heaven and earth. With Him.
O'erwatching us, we shall not be dismayed,
Though the earth removed be, and though the hills
Be cast into the roaring troubled sea.

LEVI.

Small news bring we, and our old words may jar.
But now that over us the clouds have split,
And the clear blue of Fortune's sky is seen,
Let us forget the past, and forward look ;
Let us be glad, nor lose the time to catch
The sunshine's favour on our several heads.

NATHAN.

Amen ! and let us so comport ourselves,
That the broad patch of blue in our dark sky
Be widened more and more. Prudence will lead
Our steps to mastery. We may win the goal,
Nor aught of vantage or of gain forego
That lies within our path or out of it,
If only it no further lie aside
Than that we may attach it, halting not
Our pace the while.

MORDECAI.

Prudence indeed, my friends,
Is beautiful, if she but step right on.
Her gentle hand, meek eye, and quiet voice
Win on the heart, and all who see and hear
Her moving thus, bring gifts and offerings
Of love and confidence, if not of gold.
But, in our fortunate hour let not the walls
Of our Jerusalem, shattered and fallen down,
Fade from our hearts. No sky is glad to me,
No heaven is blue, whose light points not the way
To Palestina's land, to Zion hill,
To God's own house, its service full restored,
The glory resting 'tween the Cherubim,
And to thy walls and towers built up again,
Jerusalem, beloved !

LEVI.

Amen ! amen !

And this will come in turn. And that it may,
If God so wills it, let us fix our roots
Deeper in Persia's soil, so shall we have,
Conjunctly with the will, the power to enforce
Our purpose to its fruit.

NATHAN.

Wise words do bring,
As favouring breeze the sail, our steps more near

The journey's end. But, Levi, let us not
Weaken the hands of Mordecai by aught
Of action stubborn, or mistimed, or rash.

Now that Hadassah * sits in Vashti's seat,
And in the star-like beauty of her eye
Ahasuerus only wills her will,
(Albeit she belongs to Israel's race
Is still to him unknown), and now that thou,
O Mordecai! to whom we look, hast place
Of greater trust at court, and less removed
From Esther's eminence, we may expect
Nor disappointment dread, to know the fact
To our advantage, all of us who dwell
In Shushan† here at least.

LEVI.

No doubt, no doubt;
And at the fountain-head, in safety thus
Drinking the waters, we shall see to it
That all the Jews, in all the provinces
Scattered abroad, shall lift the drooping head
Before their enemies.

* Hadassah (a myrtle), Esther's Jewish name.

† Shushan, an ancient and magnificent city, called by the Greeks, Susa, the city of the lilies, on the river Ulāi, now the Kerrah.

MORDECAI.

In the Lord we trust,
The God of Jacob is our strength and shield,
The lot of our inheritance is He.
Not mine will be the hand that will not strive
For Israel's good.

(*Aside.*) I know their secret thoughts;
Their grovelling souls would kiss the chain that binds,
If 'twere but golden. In their fathers' God
Their faith is feeble, hence our sorry case.
Hard is my task; not only to defeat
The enemy's plans, but to inspire my friends
With thoughts that will not aid that very foe.
They hint, but have not yet spoken out. 'Tis best
The game should not be started to the which
They beat the covert. They have heard, 'tis plain,
Of Haman's elevation, and they fear
His power and my imprudent honesty
Of Jewish faith, forgetting thus their God.

[*Addressing* NATHAN and LEVI.

Hadassah on the throne! Oh, brothers, think
Of that sweet child, for child she only is;
But seventeen summers have with lilies starred
Ulai's banks since to her mother's arms
The good God gave her, but for two short years,
For then her mother died, upheld by faith
In Him who shall appear to bless the world;
After the which, like one whose locks were shorn,
(Forgive me for my oft-repeated tale)

He drooped, her father faithful Abihail,
For two years more, then dying gave to me,
In solemn trust and charge, their daughter dear.
Heaven's mercy be adored for giving me
To shield her head. And now that she is ta'en,
In God's good way, from my poor care, to sit
Upon a peak of earthly state so high,
That every wind of falsehood, flattery,
Ambition, envy, malice, and revenge,
Blow round it free, and she herself is weak
And all-confiding, and the heart of kings,
Warmed into love but through their greedy eyes,
Is oftenest like the sun, when in the west,
Glowing but fading into chilly night ;—
Oh, let us think of her, and let us pray
She may not fall from us, and so unblessed
Of Israel's God, in the hour of Israel's need
Save nor herself nor us.

LEVI.

We think of her,
Not ceasing to assail the throne on high
For her and thee. But all is bright with her,
And bright with us, through her and Mordecai.
The king knows not she is of Abraham's seed ;
So far so well. We need not run i' the teeth
Of danger when a side-path can be found
To slip safe on.

NATHAN.

Your counsel, Mordecai,
Not to reveal as yet her race and birth,
She follows closely, for your word is all
To Esther still, even as it ever was
Beneath thy roof. This sudden change at court
Of vizier, may perhaps necessitate
Her movements, and thine own as well, dear friend,
To be considerate, to be tolerant,
That all may still flow smooth.

MORDECAI.

I think of this.
Nothing that unbecomes a faithful Jew
Must I attempt or hint at to the queen.
But I must hie me to the outer court.
At sunset I do Hege often see,
Who brings me trusted words. Dear friends, adieu!
Let us sit loose to man, so on our head
The candle of the Lord its light shall shed;
Besiege the throne on high with high request,
So shall the steps we take be still the best!
[Exeunt.]

SCENE III.—A GORGEOUS CHAMBER IN THE WOMEN'S HOUSE—QUEEN ESTHER RECLINING ON A DIVAN—HANDMAIDENS STANDING NEAR.

Handmaidens sing while playing on musical instruments.

First maiden sings.

In the land where lilies blow
Nodding to Ulāi's flow,
Love in quest of Beauty roves,
Finds her, brings her to his groves
Of delight, and there they dwell,
Love and Beauty happy dwell.

Second maiden sings.

When the daylight floods the sky,
Love removes from Beauty's eye;
But when evening shadows fall,
Love returns at Beauty's call;
In the sweet groves where they dwell,
Love and Beauty happy dwell.

Third maiden sings.

When the bulbul pours his lay
'Twixt the night and breaking day,
Love awaking softly sighs,
Dearest, this is paradise,
All the land in which we dwell,
Love and Beauty happy dwell.

They all sing.

Beauty, do not wander far,
Love is seeking for thy star;
In its sweet light he does see
All his heart's felicity:
Thine the bower where he will dwell,
Ever, ever, ever dwell.

ESTHER.

Thanks, maidens ! I would now be left alone.
But, Zelah, first place near my couch the vase
That holds the flowers sent by my lord, the king
This happy morn. (ZELAH places the vase.)
[*Exeunt maidens.*]

ESTHER alone.

These verily do become
My circumstance, sweet music and the dance.
But 'tis the heart that gives the character
To all around that meets the eye and ear.
Let it be joyful,—then the notes of grief
Are softened into love's melodious voice,
Calling on her beloved, who, though away,
Will ne'er unfaithful be. Let it be sad,—
The nuptial chant, by joy's own lips trilled forth,
Sounds like the muffled bell, when youthful eyes
Have closed their lids in death, for all the flowers
Of truth and hope are withered from the earth.
[*Lifting the flowers.*]

Sweet buds and blooms, children of light and love,
From your pure depths exhaling heavenly air,
And from your spotless lips, sweet words of grace
Distilling on the thirsty ear of earth,—

Oh, can you not give strength to this poor heart,
That it may nestle in the dell of love,
Withouten care, save to be happier still!
Who gathered you for me? Surely his hand
Hath dowered you with a potency of peace
No lingering memory, present doubtingness,
Or future fear, shall shake or overthrow.

Hadassah, under Mordecai's lov'd roof,
Esther, king-mated upon Persia's throne,
Art thou the one same person? Woe the day!
Truly the same,—more truly not the same.
But let me not repine or fear; thus feed
The maw of fancy, till it grows into
A vampire sucking out the crimson life
Of real joy. The God of Abraham,
Our father's God, whom Hannah's pious lips,
My nurse and friend in Mordecai's dear home,
My childhood's home, taught me to lisp
His name in prayer,—He it was who brought
Me to the throne, doubtless for some great end;
So, let me be at rest, albeit the end,
That glorious is in the Almighty's eyes,
Must be attained through conquest of the ill
Opposing goodness in this fallen world.
The king, my wedded lord, moreover, strives

In little ways (which not pursued to catch
Applauding observation, are the test
Most to be trusted of the real heart),
To make me happy, as in greater ways,
Before the court, he constantly hath done.
True, he knows not my people, though methinks
He must in some mode be prepared to learn
Without surprise that I a daughter am
Of Israel, for Mordecai with me
Holds correspondence through the chamberlains,
Not openly, indeed, as prudence bids,
Yet not so secret but the king may know't,
At least since Mordecai disclosed the plot
Of Bigthana and Teresh, Vashti's friends,
To slay the king. Haman, now raised to place,
Highest in influence beneath the throne,
(Although 'tis strange I cannot bring my mind
To trust that man) looks as he needs must do
To please the king, perhaps looks as his heart,
In innocent sincerity incites,
All happiness to be the hand that builds
My interest up. Away, then, foolish fear!

The Lord's my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?

The Lord Jehovah is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?

[Enter ZELAH.

ZELAH.

The chamberlain, O queen, awaits thy call.

ESTHER.

Let him come in. *[Enter SHAASHGAZ.*

ESTHER.

How fares it, Shaashgaz, with my lord the king?

SHAASHGAZ.

May the sun smile for ever on the queen;
The king is well.

ESTHER.

No special word for me?

SHAASHGAZ.

No special word. The flowers sent by the king
Were by his own hand gathered in the light
Of the new-risen sun.

ESTHER.

Blessed be his hand,
By Him who made the sun. Abides the king
In his own chambers, or does Persia need
His presence in the outer court to-day?

SHAASHGAZ.

Business of moment, I am told, detained
The vizier longer with the king to-day;
But now the king hath left the outer court
For his own chambers, Haman being left
In conclave with the princes.

ESTHER *aside*.

Haman stands
High in the king's regard. His seat is raised
Above the princes, who the king's face see.
How will this change touch Mordecai and all
My people, scattered through the provinces?
I inly fear. But why should I forget
The rock of my defence, and run beneath
The shields of earth! [*Addressing the Chamberlain.*

May wise men ever stand
Around the throne! If thou hast nothing more
Of interest, good Shaashgaz, to impart,
Touching the empire and my lord the king,
Or even the common life in Shushan here,
Whose buzz of energy through the still air
I often hear, thou mayest—mayest—retire,
And send my maidens. But, one moment more;
Hast Hege seen to-day? If so,—fear not.

SHAASHGAZ.

Thy question, gracious queen, has just forerun
The word upon my lip. Ere noon's high hour

Hege was with me. Mordecai, the Jew,
Whom thou so valuest for his services
In the king's behalf, handed to him this roll
To be by Hatach's care conveyed to you ;
But I have brought it, as I was informed,
Hatach, at your command, is now abroad
In Shushan's busy streets.

ESTHER.

Good Shaashgaz, thanks ;
In this confided act you favour me,
Nor shall I let it slip,—

[Shouts heard without.

What shouts are these
Of acclamation ? Does the king ride forth,
That all the throats of Shushan rend the air
Thus with their joy ?

SHAASHGAZ.

No, 'tis the cry that meets
The vizier passing through the palace gates
To his own home. The royal pleasure is
That all do bow the knee, and reverence show
To Haman thus. And all do willingly
Obey the king, save Mordecai, the Jew.
He moves nor head nor knee, though Haman's eye
Looks straight upon him, and not too well pleased,
As I am told. The eager throng without,
Dependent on the court and on his smile,

Whose sun shines brightest for the passing hour,
Hail his approach. It is the cry these raise
Doubtless we hear.

ESTHER *aside*.

It must be even so;
But why should Mordecai alone refuse!
[*Addressing the Chamberlain.*
Now Shaashgaz, thou wilt leave me. At my need,
My maidens I will summon for myself.
[*Exit. SHAASHGAZ.*

ESTHER *alone*.

What hid'st thou in thy faithful breast for me
Oh! solemn burden-bearer of true joy
Or real sorrow? Thy external touch
Excites me, but the voice, the voice within,
Oh! what saith it? [Opens the letter and reads.

“His favour who created the heaven and the earth
rest on the king and thee! Blessed be His holy
name that thou art well. Hannah, her tears of joy,
mingles with mine, when from thine own hand we
learn that thou art well and happy. Know for thy
joy that the Lord is still making His face to shine
upon us, giving His servants health. Haman, the
Agagite, as thou doubtless hast heard, has by the king
been promoted to the seat nearest the throne. God's
thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways.

‘Verily, Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God, of Israel, the Saviour!’ Let not Hadassah forget her fathers’ God! Let her not sink when trial comes: they are strong who lean on the arm of the Almighty. Through Hege this will come to thy hand. The Lord be with thee! The Lord be with all His people. Amen.

MORDECAI.”

Full of good words thou art, but yet not free
From indications of an inward fear
In Mordecai, that troublous times are nigh.
’Tis ever thus. In all our joy there lurks
A seed which, seen or unseen at the time,
On laughter’s wing borne like the thistle-down
Upon the wind, will drop into our hearts
And grow betimes into the dismal tree
That hears the breath of sighs among its boughs.
Therefore, it still becomes us to be calm,
Not drooping overmuch when our wheel sinks,
Nor hoping overmuch when it ascends.
That we attain to permanent quietude,
The wheel must roll. Then let us only look
To Him who guides the chariot of the world,
That the small movement of our single lot
May, with His gracious plan, be consonant.
But let me scan the contents once again.
Heaven’s favour prayed for on the king and me;
Joy at my welfare, from the letter learned
I sent through Hege; they too both are well;

Good news indeed ! But let me ponder this,—
Haman is spoken of here, and then succeed
Words from Esaia's mouth of solemn weight ;
Next, counsel needful specially for me
At this conjuncture, as it would appear
(If I interpret rightly what is writ),
That I shall not forget my fathers' God.

Methinks I see the fountain of these thoughts
In Mordecai's shrewd breast. He fears his act
Towards the vizier will bring down distress
On Jewish heads, not passing me, though queen.
But then, why acts he so? why acts he so?
Would I knew that!

ACT II.

SCENE I.—STREET IN FRONT OF THE KING'S GATE— CITIZENS ASSEMBLING.

FIRST CITIZEN.

The vizier must be coming now.

SECOND CITIZEN.

We'll soon know that amongst this crowd

THIRD CITIZEN.

Not every day one sees you on the step.

FIRST CITIZEN.

The king's command, good friend, you know is law.
But I for one am here of heart and will. Shushan
knows well how, when, and whom to show respect
unto.

THIRD CITIZEN.

Ay! ay! By whom we live, for them we pray.
But notwithstanding, Haman is a most proper vizier,
doubtless.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Not so fast, neighbour, not just so fast. One has
as good a right as another to a good place.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

And that is the very reason, and a sound reason too it is, why I wish to get along.

FIRST CITIZEN.

No squabbling, neighbours, no squabbling. I suppose we are all at one in obeying the king's command. So, so——

FOURTH CITIZEN.

All right, all right! But, first on the ground, best on the ground.

ALL.

Yonder come the heralds. Huzzah!

FIRST HERALD.

Make way for the vizier! Make way for the vizier!
Bow the knee! Bow the knee!

SECOND HERALD.

The vizier comes! Uplift the palace gates!

(The cortege moves slowly forward, the crowd showing the most abject reverence to Haman. The cortege disappears within the first gate.)

SCENE II.—INSIDE OF THE FIRST GATE AND IN FRONT OF THE OUTER COURT. HAMAN, REVERENCED BY ALL THE OFFICIALS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF MORDECAI, WHOM HE EYES STERNLY, PASSES INTO THE PALACE. MORDECAI AND OTHER OFFICIALS LEFT STANDING.

FIRST OFFICIAL.

Mordecai, why transgressest thou the king's commandment?

SECOND OFFICIAL.

Time after time too. For my part, I look on this conduct as disgraceful

THIRD OFFICIAL.

If we in office here act so, what needs the king to speak? And what wonder if the abjects of the land do toss their heads. I do not think it right that this should sleep. I like to be open. Mordecai must explain, or——

FOURTH OFFICIAL.

It were well for thee to explain, Mordecai, and change thy line for the future.

THIRD OFFICIAL.

Mordecai explain,—not he. The person who can boldly show contempt to the prince that sits nearest

the king, will not explain to you or me, I warrant you.

FIRST OFFICIAL.

We must all be faithful, and speak the truth at any rate. The vizier, in passing, looked most angrily at Mordecai. If I am a prophet, we have not seen the end of this matter.

ALL.

Shame, Mordecai! Shame, Mordecai!

SECOND OFFICIAL.

He is no friend in his heart to Persia, who can mock her rulers.

FIRST OFFICIAL.

Let us withdraw. We may not call friend Mordecai to answer, and I judge he will do as he pleases. But like seed, like fruit. I must go for one.

ALL.

Yes; it is better we withdraw. [*Officials going.*]

MORDECAI.

Friends, but a moment stay. I wonder not
Or at your words or acts. I have not bowed
The knee to Haman. You do look on me
As the king's enemy and his. The king

Hath no more loyal heart within the walls
Of Shushan than mine own. Why I bow not
When the new vizier passes, I could tell,
But haply you would still not understand.
If 'tis enough to satisfy your minds
To know I am a Jew, then, know the fact,
That I a faithful son of Abraham am.
If that sufficeth not, I can but ask
You to believe my motive holy. Thou
Jehovah know'st——

ALL.

No more, no more,—ha! ha!

FIRST OFFICIAL.

The Jew will out. I always said as much, in my
own mind at least.

SECOND OFFICIAL.

How he could keep us all in ignorance!

THIRD OFFICIAL.

He would not be a Jew if he did otherwise than try
to blind. The name that he invokes—but let that
pass. All is in perfect keeping. Friends, would you
learn a secret? What, if the plot-disclosing Mordecai
here, is finding access, through certain chamberlains,
into the Women's House to the queen, the king not
knowing it!

MORDECAI *aside*.

Oh, thou deceitful tongue!

Now that occasion hath unlocked thy play,
How thou dost gnash upon me! But, I leave
My cause, O God, to Thee! [*Addressing the officials.*

I am a Jew;

And though I did not thrust the unwelcome fact
Uncalled-for forth, I ne'er did make it seem
In falsity, that I was not a Jew.

But, ye are faithless friends, lifting the heel
Against me instantly that Haman frowned.
I say again, my motive holy is;
No more I say. No more I need to say;
Harsh words, harsh words beget. My course is clear.

ALL.

Even so, Jew Mordecai! Even so, even so!
We go another way. [*Exeunt officials.*

MORDECAI *alone*.

God of my fathers, strengthen and guide me now.
What! To the accursed Amalekite bend low,
Haman, the Agagite, the doubly-doomed!
O Amalek, thy name from under heaven
Shall blotted be;—the Lord's mouth hath said this.
Thou wast the first to oppose the chosen flock,
From Egypt, led by God through Moses' care
Up to the Promised Land. Shall we forget,
O Israel, what Amalek did to thee?

He met thee by the way; the hindmost smote;
 Even all that feeble were and left behind
 He cut them off, and did not fear thy God,
 The living God. Shall we the crime of Saul
 Repeat to-day, and spare the Agagite?
 Nay, do him reverence, and so bring down
 The curse of Amalek on our guilty heads?
 Shall I to Haman idol-worship pay,
 And so forsake the living God and true
 Even in the heathens' eyes, 'mong whom we dwell?

Haman! As in thy veins does circulate
 The blood of Agag, whom our first king spared,
 But Samuel hewed in pieces,—by the doom
 By God's mouth spoken and on us imposed
 To see fulfilled, that Amalek's foul name
 From under heaven shall blotted be,—I swear
 That I will turn mine eyes away from thee,
 In scorn and anger, when thou passest by;
 That I will pray to God to wither up
 Thy roots from earth, because I fear the Lord;
 That I will give myself into God's hand,
 To be by Him used in what way He please,
 To stablish in the eyes of all the earth,
 The verity of His most holy word
 Of promise, and of judgment, spoken of old.

Yet Thou, O Abraham's God, O Lord, our God,
 Thou knowest all things, and Thou knowest this,—
 That neither in contempt nor pride it is,
 Nor for desire of glory, that to this

Haman I bow not. I could be content,
For Israel's salvation, with good will
To kiss the soles of his feet. But I do this,
Not bend the knee when Haman passes by,
That I may not the glory of man prefer
Above Thy glory; nor will I worship give
To any but to Thee. Give grace! give grace!
I am all need. I would be led aright.

Faith in my God, His holiness, His truth,
Kindles and feeds the hatred that I bear
To this proud Haman. May it stronger grow,
And stronger still!

[Exit.]

SCENE III.—AN APARTMENT IN HAMAN'S HOUSE.

HAMAN *alone*.

He is a Jew! My instinct knew the fact
Before Oarshena told me. It could not
But be that Haman's blood, of royal source
From Agag flowing, should into a flame
Of hatred burst, the moment that it felt
The air inhaled by an accursed Jew.
An exile, too, the viper! and he dares
Not to stand up, or move, when I pass by.

Haman, the Agagite, the vizier prince,
Of Perso-Media, to be contemned

By Mordecai, whose rightful place should be
Lowest among the slaves that feed my dogs.
But the whole race is cursed; and though I could
This moment tear the life from out his throat,
And fling his carcase to the fowls, 'twere scorn
In me to lay my hands on him alone,—
A tiny drop to cool the furnace rage
Of my revenge. Man, woman, child, yea, all
Of Hebrew blood, like vermin burrowing
Throughout the provinces, must fall as well.
Yet, were the knave to obey the king's command,
And reverence me, I'd deign to let him live
And all his crew. But as it is not so,
My hand shall smite them all and every one.

Ahasuerus, brother of the sun,
Reigning o'er all the lands the sun beholds,
From India in the East, even to the clime
The Ethiop calls his own,—o'er provinces
An hundred seven and twenty, each as great
As asks its satrap to be called a king,—
Haman, who sways Ahasuerus' self,
Will, with a finger-shake, these vile slaves pluck
From Persia's social life, both root and branch.

I've heard from his own lips, Hammedatha
My father, of the deadly enmity
Between our races in the days of old;
How they swarmed in upon our sacred soil,
A locust multitude of slaves, escaped
From Pharaoh's ownership; and how their God

(Weak, surely, else how come they to be here
Bondsmen, where I sit all but on the throne)
Dared to pronounce, (O Baal, hear't again!)
A curse upon the sons of Amalek.

Their God, a demon or the embodied shape
By their foul fancy deified, of all
Their violence, and treachery, and pride,
Hath spoken the word that makes my course but one,—
Death to the Jews, and double death to him
Who leering sits within the palace gate
When Haman passes by!

(Enter ZERESH, Haman's wife, with their two sons,
PARSHANDATHA and DAHLON.)

HAMAN.

My wife and boys!
My thought hath found its way to Baal's ear.
Zeresh, my mind sought thee with the last breath
That I respired, and, lo! thou standest there.

ZERESH.

Zeresh would ne'er be far from Haman's side,
For from his chariot in the sun our god
Looks kindly on thee, and we wish to move
Under his smile with thee.

PARSHANDATHA.

Father, guess thou
Whom should I teach, or rather, whom should we,

Dahlon and I, not half an hour ago,
A lesson worthy for a prince to give?

HAMAN.

I cannot guess.

PARSHANDATHA.

The envious scurvy Jew
Who keeps the second door in the outer court.
Just as we rounded from the garden wall
The Jew was on us unaware. He drew
Backward his step. Unstopping, we moved on,
Making him reel, with a deep curse to boot,
Against the wall.

HAMAN.

Did he not curse you, then?

DAHLON.

'Twas well, for his own safety, he did not,
But slunk away.

ZERESH.

Our sons know what they are.

HAMAN.

Yes, through their veins, Zeresh, from you and me,
The genuine stream is flowing. Ye did well.
But after this, let not your word or act,

Or look, confess the presence of the Jew.
Leave him and all his tribe, or tribes, to me.
I will you teach to hate your enemy,
As Baal, with his thunderbolts, hates his.
Woe to the Jew! Not only shall he fall,
But his whole race. This have I sworn, and here
I swear again! But come, let us within.
Call my diviners to me. We shall light
The sacred fire, the magic circle draw,
Repeat the charm, and from his shrine bring forth,
In the oratory, the image of our god,
Whose glorious face looks on us from yon sun,
And there cast Pur, to ascertain the month
In this full year, and next, the day of the month,
Propitious most for drowning of my hate
In streams of Jewish blood! [Exeunt.

SCENE IV.—THE KING'S BANQUETING HALL.

*Present at the feast: Ahasuerus on the royal couch,—
Haman, princes, nobles, etc.*

AHASUERUS.

Princes and nobles, let your hearts be glad
And at their ease. It is with joy the king
Sees you around him here. The reverence
Becoming your approach to royalty

Which wields on earth the authority and power
Of the great Spirit, who, from yonder throne
Of light orb'd for our worship in the sky,
Looks down,—dispense with now, nor fear to offend.

Your minds devote to Perso-Media's good,
Ranging through all her countless provinces,
Require oblivion of their heavy cares
Oftener perhaps than they have yet received;
So they of new may tighten to the spring
That sends the shaft of duty to its mark.
We spread the feast for you. Let Shushan's vaults
Pour forth their richest stores. Ahasuerus drinks,—
Glory to Persia,—to her princes, health!

THE GUESTS.

Glory to Persia, to her princes, health!

[*They drink,—Music.*]

AHASUERUS.

And nobles, as we taste the generous juice,
Freely as friend with friend,—I, laying by,
To pleasure you and pleasure too myself,
The form and ceremony which surround,
As a fit medium for the subject's eyes
To look upon it, the divinity
Inherent in the sceptre and the crown
Enthroned in state,—you, casting to the ground
All doubt, if e'er you doubted of my love,
And the high feeling of repose my mind

Hath in your wisdom and your loyalty,—
Let us be merry! Yet, though I aside
Have laid my state to breathe your freer air,
Remember, I am still the king who reigns
From India to Ethiopia's bounds,
And, to the measure of my majesty,
Willing as able your request to grant,
Though these requests, in our assurances,
Should swell in bulk even till a province fail
Of room to let them stretch out to the full,
The wine-cup raise! Health to you, nobles all!
And joy to every star that sheds its beams
Of beauty on us in our easy hours!

ALL THE GUESTS

Even so! even so! Long live the king and queen!
[*All drink again,—Music.*]

MEMUCAN.

The king's smile is the life of all our hearts.
It is our joy to serve our lord, the king,
The brother of the sun! his word is law
To regulate and to compel the world.
Princes and nobles, peers within the realm
Of Medo-Persia, under our great king,
Say, do I speak the truth when thus I speak,—
We have but one request, O sire, to make,
Which is, that you declare to us your will
For our obedience, prompt and free and full.

Our wish and joy it is to hear thy voice.
And in thy presence now our hearts leap up,
Not merely from the elastic power of love
Burning within, but, through that power inflamed
To tenfold energy, by all the grace
And freedom showered upon us in these words
Fallen from thy lips. We do forget our toils
For Medo-Persia's benefit to-day.
Nay, were these toils weighted a thousand-fold,
With caution, effort, pain, protractedness,
One happy hour given us to bask as here,
Within this royal sunshine, would o'erpay
Them all with satisfaction and delight;
Yea, would transmute them all to roots of joy,
From which would spring flowers to bestar the path
Of all our future life. Long live the king!

AHASUERUS.

Our joy is mutual. Let the wine-cup flash
Again and yet again! *[They drink,—Music.]*

SHETHAR.

I needs must speak.
This is the happiest day, the proudest day
That I have known. Lo! we are all at one!
Who shall stand up, what people shall stand up
Before the glorious majesty and might
Of Ahasuerus, sovereign lord of earth,
Who smiles upon us now, binding the realm,

From east to west, thus with more massive chains
Than outward law? If true desire hath aught
Of room left to it by the happiness
Within my soul, it is, O gracious king,
That we may see, what we shall surely see,
The earth beneath thy heel. In destiny
Beneath thy heel it is. Let us foredate
E'en now the actual fact, and pledge the cup
To victory! Let, let the world rejoice!
Dismay to Medo-Persia's enemies!
Long live the king! Long live the king and queen!

ADMATHA.

To victory! Long live the king and queen!
And long live they, and only they who cry,—
Long live the king and queen! But victors claim
The ungirdled goddess' smiles among the vines.
Ha! ha! ha! ha! Who shall deny our claims?

AHASUERUS.

None here! none here! Nobles, the wine, the wine!
[*They drink,—Music.*]

HAMAN *aside*.

Now that the wine sits top, and that the course
Of word and feeling favours my design,
I'll seize the tide. O Baal, answer me!
So shall thy fires burn bright!

[*Addressing the king, etc.*]

Who can refrain
In this benignant atmosphere, O sire!

AHASUERUS.

We all rejoice to hear
The vizier's voice, the worthy vizier's voice!

HAMAN.

Spoken of by you, O king, in terms like these,
And by the princes favoured with applause,
The fount of feeling so o'erflows within,
I may not frame my speech in courtier wise,
I must speak from the heart unto the heart
In honest homely phrase, all form dismissed.
O king! your happiness among us here
Rewards us more than wealth, and place, and power.
When hearts flow out, truth gives the thought and words,
While pure affection strengthens all her cords.
Who shall deny that Medo-Persia's realm
Is happy in her king, and doubly so
That thus her king pledges the brimming cup
To friendship, victory, and star-eyed love,
With us, his nobles, through these glowing hours?

AHASUERUS.

Nobles, the wine, the wine! To friendship drink,
And victory and love!

[*They drink,—Music.*]

HAMAN.

Yet if my love and care
For thee, O king, greatest of kings on earth,
Kindest and best to me, thy unworthy slave,
Should from my lips draw forth one little word
Discordant from the general voice to-night,
You will forgive me,—for I cannot bear,
When thus I see you happy, to conceal
Aught that would make that happiness still more.

THE PRINCES.

Speak plain! speak plain! we half know what you mean.
Haman hath nought but the king's good at heart;
The king knows this.

AHASUERUS.

Say what you would advise,
Good Haman, that it may at once be done.

HAMAN.

In one word, then;—within the mighty bounds
Of Persia dwell a loyal populace,
Yet, it may not seem wonderful to us
If 'mong so many peoples should be found
Some nation, small in number and in note,
Disloyal and pernicious.

AHASUERUS.

Say no more;
If there is such a nation, root it out!

HAMAN

There is a certain people, gracious sire,
Dispersed o'er all the empire, having laws
And ordinances of their own, diverse
From those of all other people, nor keep they
The king's laws; therefore, gracious sire, it is
Not for thy profit so to suffer them.
If it do please the king, let it be written
That they be all destroyed, and I will pay
Ten thousand talents of silver into the hands
Of those who have committed to their charge
The business thereof, to be forthwith brought
Into the treasuries of the king.

AHASUERUS.

Take this,
The royal ring, my faithful counsellor.
The silver I give to thee, the people too,
To do with them as to you seems most good.

HAMAN.

The work entrusted to my hands to-night
By thee, O king, shall faithfully be performed.
And now forgive me that my care of thee
And Persia would not let my spirit rest,
But that it must make known its honest zeal,
Even in the festive hour. My mind's at peace.
Now, let the power of Medo-Persia here,
Princes and nobles—peers, the wine-cup pledge

With me unto the cry, loyal and true,
As ever pierced the light to Baal's ear,—
Long live the king and queen, and long live they,
And only they, who cry—Long live the king!

ALL.

Long live the king and queen, and Baal's curse,
Through Haman's hands, light on their enemies!

AHASUERUS.

Now, nobles, let us part. Yet parting so,
We leave not pleasure, for we do but go
From general pleasure to the special bower
Which love hath builded for her sleepy hour.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

SCENE I.—IN THE STREET BEFORE THE KING'S GATE.

(Mordecai, in sackcloth with ashes, coming slowly forward towards the gate. A group of Jews at some distance behind him. Citizens apart observing.)

MORDECAI.

Alas! alas! The king hath so decreed
That we be slain,—the Jews, both young and old,
Women and children, on a fixed day,
In every province, that we all be slain.
Woe to the land when vile men sit in place!

GROUP OF JEWS.

Alas for us! Our enemy prevails.
We must be slain; the king hath so decreed.
Led by our enemy, the king decrees
That on a certain day we be destroyed.
Alas for us and ours! Alas! alas!

A CITIZEN.

That cruel law! See, there is Mordecai
In bitter lamentation, with a crowd
Of Jews behind him. Let us stand aside;
Distress doth ever claim room for itself;

The ground it treads is holy, or should be.
Oh, what a piteous cry! Alas for them!

ANOTHER CITIZEN.

Captives, and eating up the bread should fill
Our and our children's mouths. I pity them?
My sympathy, in right, begins at home.
Would that the day were come. How have they wealth?
Where have they got their wealth? I am but poor.
Poor they appear, but yet they have the gold.
The vizier and the king, I warrant, know
Plenty of these same Jews. Alas for them?

MORDECAI.

Woe, woe the day! The king, by Haman led,
Hath thus decreed,—that all the Jews be slain,
Destroyed from off the earth, both young and old;
A nation that has ne'er injurious been
To any man, given up to be destroyed.
In our distress, O Lord, our God, to Thee
We cry; look down and pity us and save!

GROUP OF JEWS.

O God of heaven! bow down thine ear and hear!
Our cry must pierce the clouds. Haste to our aid.
The enemy puffs at us. Tarry not.
Lest we become a prey, and Thy word fail
Which to our father Abraham Thou gav'st.

[Enter messenger from the QUEEN to MORDECAI.]

MESSENGER.

The queen is grieved to hear of your distress;
She would remove it. Lay your grief aside.
Raiment she sends for me to clothe you with
And take away your sackcloth. Hear my words.

MORDECAI.

The queen is good; but words, even the queen's words,
Cannot remove the burden of our woe.
I may not listen nor take. So do I send
The raiment back. *[Messenger withdraws.*

MORDECAI *continues.*

Hadassah queen !
Tenderest of human hearts, alas for thee !
Alas for all of us ! What shalt thou do ?
What shall we do ? Down, down, misgiving heart !
What shall we do ? Let us see nought of earth
But only Thee, O God, who wilt direct
Our footsteps in the way that we shall choose.
Earth fails, and is become but one wide grave ;
Our eyes are towards Thee. *[Enter HATACH.*

HATACH.

What load of grief
Thus weighs thee down upon the public street ?
Unseal its fountain. Lo ! the queen herself
Beseeches thee to speak, to let her know

Thy sorrow in its cause, if it may be
Her hand shall reach the root and pluck it up.

MORDECAI *looking up*.

O ! Hatach, is it thou ? A friend thou art
A friend thou hast been,—be thou friendly now.
Thou friendly art,—I therefore will speak free.

Sackcloth with ashes I do wear, thou see'st ;
It well becomes. How, Hatach, must it be ?
On me as on his enemy, Haman looks,
And, in a sense, he errs not looking so.
I will not hide ; for to an Amalekite,
And claiming idol-reverence through the king
By the king's command (Hatach, unto the queen
Say plainly this), I ne'er will bow the knee,
I ne'er will friendly be ; I must oppose,
And will oppose. Unto the king himself
I loyal am. God knows I speak the truth.
Nor would I unattacked uplift my hand
To injure Haman, but I cannot do
Diverse from what I've done. When Haman passed
I stood not up nor moved ; nought else I did ;
So was the vizier wroth, and being told
I was a Jew, his wicked tongue hath caused
The king to order by decree the death
Of all the Jews in all the provinces
Upon a day, Haman into their hands
Who have the charge, paying of silver good
Ten thousand talents, to compensate loss

Of tribute to the king. That this is so,
Behold the king's decree at Shushan given !
This copy give the queen; and, Hatach, hear !
Charge her that she should go unto the king
To supplicate unto him, and to make
Request for us, her people and her kin.

HATACH.

I will not fail in aught that you have given
In charge to me, and soon may I return
With words to scatter from above the Jews
This awful cloud. But, Mordecai, thou know'st,
And all do know, that whosoever comes
Unto the king into the inner court,
Who is not called,—there is one law of his
That he shall die, except to whom the king
Holds out the golden sceptre that he live.
And for these thirty days hath not the queen
Been called to come in once unto the king.

MORDECAI.

The queen so faltering, make you answer thus,—
Think not within thyself thou shalt escape
In the king's house, more than shall all the Jews.
If now thou altogether hold thy peace,
Then shall enlargement and deliverance come
From other quarter to the Jews,—but thou
And all thy father's house shall be destroyed,

And who knows whether for this very time
Thou'rt to the kingdom come.

HATACH.

Alas! alas! But Esther shall be told
All that thou bid'st. [Exit HATACH.

MORDECAI.

Jehovah, God of heaven and earth, who hast
All under Thee, and turnest as Thou wilt
The hearts of men,—in mercy now look down
Upon Hadassah, Esther, on the throne
Of Persia, through Thee, in this our plight,
And guide her spirit to do all Thy will.
And may that will, if in Thy holy plan
It ordered is, be, that she save Thy flock,
Israel Thy chosen, out of the lion's mouth.
The house of Jacob (this the prophet's word)
Thou wilt not utterly destroy,—so still
The enemy 'gainst us must rage in vain;
In vain at least as to behold our fall
And utter extirpation from the earth.
I thank Thee, Father, for this gracious word.
But snatch us wholly from the enemy's teeth,
And speedily too, for we are in the snare
(Pardon my zeal that would Thy hand direct),
By Thy poor handmaid, that the heathen may
Give Thee the glory, and we never leave
Thy service more. [Re-enter HATACH.

HATACH.

Esther hath bidden this answer be returned,—
Go gather all the Jews in Shushan here,
And for me fast, and neither eat nor drink
Three days or night or day. I and my maids
Will likewise fast, and so unto the king
I will go in, which is against the law,
And if I die, I die.

MORDECAI.

Grace unto grace!
O God of heaven! I render thanks to Thee.
Hatach, inform the queen all she commands
Will be obeyed, so in her holy path
She do go boldly on. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—QUEEN'S PRIVATE CHAMBER.—ESTHER IS
BEING ARRAYED IN HER ROYAL ROBES.

ESTHER.

Thanks, maidens, for your care. Now would I be
Myself alone. [*Exeunt maidens.*

ESTHER *alone.*

Now the three days are past
To prayer and fasting dedicate for me
By Mordecai and all the Jews within

The walls of Shushan, and by me for them
And for myself, that God would stretch His arm
For our deliverance, pardoning our sin
Which reacheth to the clouds, for the sake of Him,
The appointed seed, whose day (may it be near!)
Shall bless all lands. I have risen up again,
The sombre weeds cast off, and, lo ! the robes
Of splendour, joy, and power gleam in their stead.

Ah me ! This heavy weight upon my soul
The heavier is because from human eye
It is concealed. Splendour external mocks
A grieving spirit, and apparent power,
When the heart fails us, but gives strength to flee.
O God of heaven ! draw near, uphold and guide !
My task o'erwhelms. How has it come to pass
That upon me, the weakest of the weak,
The burden of the Jews' deliverance
Should be imposed ? It surely is not so.
Send help, O God ! by whom Thou wilt send help,
But not by, by——O Father in the heavens,
My yielding faith forgive. Strong feeling pulls
Me many ways at once. Thou know'st our frame.
Let me not fall from Thee. Ah ! is it thus
I falter, and Thine ear for three whole days
Has been besieged by penitential sighs
And earnest prayer, that Thou shouldst now give help
To Thy poor handmaid ? Thou hast not cast off
Thy folk for ever. Thou didst save of old
By Thy great power, through feeble instruments,

A sapless rod,* dull hands held up in prayer,†
A shepherd's sling,‡ and wilt Thou not again,
By weaker instrument, by even me
(But weaker, so the fitter for Thy use),
Display Thine arm, and quickly bring to nought
The deadly malice of our enemy?

I move not of myself, nor wish to move
Save as Thine handmaid to do all Thy will;
So moving, I succeed whate'er befall.

O, Mordecai! my parents both in one,
Who hast been, art, and ever must remain
In the estimation of my grateful heart,
I thee obey, as thou dost but obey
Thy God and mine, the God of all the earth.

Beneath thy roof, in Hannah's pious care,
Nurse, friend, instructress, childhood's, girlhood's days
Rolled happy on (bear witness, burning tear,
Now falling on my hand), before the voice
Of providence inscrutable me called
To occupy that seat which highest raised
Above the broad base of the sober earth,
Rocks, and, if falling, to the flinty ground
The heaviest comes. But tender memories
Do but intrude upon necessity
Present and stern. I must, I will obey!

But 'tis against the law, even for the queen,
Nay, most for her, to go unto the king

* Exodus iv. 2.

† Exodus xvii. 12.

‡ 1 Samuel xvii. 50.

In the inner court uncalled. And, let me see,
'Tis now a full moon, and two weary days
Besides, since my companionship was asked,
Which looks as if the edge of the king's love
Were dulled by time, or turned away from me
By some new charm, or, as if poisoned thoughts
Against me had been dropped into his mind
By some foul tongue. Away! regrets and fears,
Unfounded or well founded, hence, away!
It makes no count. I am Hadassah sure,
But Esther too, and Esther only now.
My kindred are in bitter case. My hands,
As men do judge, can only bring to them
Deliverance; so forward I do hie,
Looking to God, and if I die, I die!

[*Exit.*

SCENE III.—INNER CHAMBER—KING ASCENDS THE
THRONE—PRINCES STANDING NEAR.

MEMUCAN.

May the sun smile for ever on the king.
Long live the king!

PRINCES.

Long live the king! Long live the king!

AHASUERUS.

The king returns to all the princely chiefs

Of Perso-Media health and joy for aye.

Now is there aught of weight touching the realm
That must have treatment of despatch? Our mind
Would glance at it and speak. For, sooth to say,
We wish not to bear hence an ounce of care
To clog our pleasure's foot. What may detain
The vizier from us?

MEMUCAN.

He will be here anon.

Meantime I do inform the king for him
That nought of mo——

[ESTHER suddenly appears at the entrance of the hall.

AHASUERUS, rising quickly up.

The queen, my lords, the queen!

(The king descends the steps of the throne holding out the golden sceptre. The queen, greatly agitated, approaches and touches the top of the sceptre, then kneels before the king.)

ALL THE PRINCES.

Long live the queen! Long live the king and queen!

AHASUERUS.

Esther, my love, my queen, be calm, arise,
And on the throne take thy due place by me.

[ESTHER is led by the king to the seat at his right hand.

[*King continuing.*]

Now, Esther, what wilt thou, what thy request ?
It shall be even given thee to the half
Of all the kingdom.

ESTHER.

If it do seem good
Unto the king, then let my lord the king,
And Haman with him, to the banquet come
I have prepared for him.

AHASUERUS.

Your guests are we.
Cause Haman to make haste that he may do
As hath Queen Esther said. [Enter HAMAN.]

[*King addressing HAMAN.*]

Haman, thy face
Hath been desired not by myself alone,
But by the queen as well, nay, most by her.
Her royal pleasure is that I with you
Come to the banquet which she hath prepared
In her own chambers even to-day. The wine
The queen hath mingled to our lips will come
With its inherent virtue as by charm
A thousand-fold increased.

HAMAN.

The queen in this,

And you, O king, on my unworthy head
Heap honours and distinctions that my heart
Through wildering gladness snatches from my tongue
Both thoughts and words.

AHASUERUS.

Esther, we go with you.
My lords, it is my pleasure that you feast
All by yourselves in the great hall of state.
We with the queen to her own chambers go,
To feast with her, my love for her to show. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.—AN APARTMENT IN HAMAN'S HOUSE.

(*Enter HAMAN, ZERESH, his wife, PARSHANDATHA,
their son, and a number of Friends.*)

HAMAN.

Welcome, my friends, and, Zeresh, praise is thine,
That 'neath our roof so quickly thou hast called
To entertainment worthy, these our friends.
But just thyself art thou in this despatch.

ZERESH.

Acting of purpose, I had brought our friends
Together ere your messenger came here,
Since upon Haman's head will thus descend

Honours and glory, that they all may share
Our happiness by hearing, and by sight,
And happily profit from the sunshine too;
So when you sent, lo! we were all at hand.

HAMAN.

Fortune in little as in great things smiles;
And if in everything she does not smile
We will persuade her or perchance compel.
Welcome, my friends! How shall we pleasure you?

ZERESH.

What news at court? What news have you to tell?
The time is short till our bright god retires
Into his tent, leaving the world to close
Its eye in sleep, that thereby being refreshed
It may again glance at his dazzling face:
Therefore we must bestir to enjoy ourselves.
What news at court? Say, am I asking right
In asking this, dear friends?

A FRIEND.

No pleasure do we wish more than to hear
The vizier speak. His greatness with his worth
Strives to keep pace, but limps as yet behind.
May it come up forthwith, and then his name
Will scarce be called the second in the land.

PARSHANDATHA.

The cursed Jews removed, no cloud remains
To blot our sky. Father, the day draws on;
But growing hate feeding my sharp desire
The time seems long. When it does come, I swear
By thee, O Baal! no son of Abraham
Shall with his foul breath taint the air of heaven
One further hour.

HAMAN.

Parshandatha, thy words,
Like a strong magnet, draw forth to the light
The very load that lies upon my mind.
Naming the Jews, you have the fountain tapp'd
Of my concernment. We are all at one
In longing for the day to smite the Jew,
And lay our hands on the abundant spoil
Each for himself. Speak I the truth, my friends?

FRIENDS.

The king's decree, O vizier, is thy work;
Thou art the king's most faithful counsellor;
Down with the Jews, and let us seize the spoil!

HAMAN.

With somewhat patience I can wait the day
Of general vengeance on the Hebrew race;
But, to be plain, I scarce can hold my hands

From throttling that contemptuous Israelite
That daily mocks me at the palace gate.

Think, friends, of his assurance, bowing not
To me who am the prince nearest the throne
In glory and in power. Think, in detail,—
The revenues of fifty cities flow
Into my treasures in silver, gold,
Spices, and precious stones; wine, corn, and oil
My storehouses oppress; my flocks and herds
From very multitude remain untold;
My daughters many are and fair; my sons
In number ten, high-souled and high in place,
And, if I rightly judge, not born to bear
Insult or opposition in their path;
Myself promoted, and my seat advanced
'Bove all the princes, till but in the name
Alone it is below the throne itself.

Yea, even this very day Esther the queen
Unto the banquet which she had prepared
Did let no man come 'companying the king
Saving myself, and, on to-morrow too
Am I invited unto her with the king.

Considering these,—think of the Jewish cur
That moves not when the vizier passes by.
All, all avails me nothing whiles I see
This Mordecai still sitting at the gate.

PARSHANDATHA.

Let me go forth, and ere the sun withdraws
My sword shall rid him from our path.

ZERESH.

Forbear;

Thy heart is sound, my son, thy thought is rash.
But, husband, cause that in the court there, now
Be made a gallows fifty cubits high,
And on the morrow speak thou to the king
That Mordecai the Jew be hanged thereon,
Then go thou in merrily with the king
Unto the banquet.

FRIENDS.

The very course to take.

Order forthwith the gibbet to be reared,
And on the morrow let the cursed Jew
Dangle in air. Why should this petty mote
Mar the pure sunlight in the vizier's eyes
For one short hour?

HAMAN.

It pleaseth me, dear friends.

Parshandatha, bid workmen strip at once,
And to their mettle stretch them. The first thing
My eyes would look in to-morrow's light
Is the high gibbet ready for the Jew.

[Exit Parshandatha.]

HAMAN *continuing*.

Now, Zeresh, marshal us to where our feet,
In the great hall, to music time shall beat ;
The dance, the goblet, and the song agree,
When with our hearts all things go merrily.

[*Exeunt*.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—THE ROYAL PRIVATE CHAMBER.

AHASUERUS RECLINING ON A COUCH.

AHASUERUS.

I cannot sleep. My eyelids will awake,
Do as I may. The pressure of my hand,
A moveless posture, and an aching wish
In body and in mind for rest, but scare
The downy-pinioned goddess more away.
I fain would sleep,—not that my cares oppress,
But that they are so light. I would have change
Of scene awhile. If only but in dream,
I would be hungry, thirsty, longing, faint;
Be clutching at some joy, which from my grasp
Still snatched away, incited my desire
To keener relish. I would from very ease,
As from sore travail, have surcease awhile.
By satisfaction all unsatisfied
My spirit wanders o'er the idle hills
Of whims and fancies. Here and there it darts,
But will not settle down, and nod, and lose
Itself in sweet oblivious dewy sleep.

How deep the stillness all around! Methinks
That sleep herself, into the slumberous depths

Of the dead silence and repose, her hand
Hath poured on every sound-awaking power,
Hath fallen adown before she reached my couch,
And will not wake till the bright god of day
Catch her trespassing on his wakeful reign.

Ha! this is very torture. I will rise,
And if it be so, it must just be so—
Seize the new day's delight with the weak hand
Of yesterday's unrested appetite.

Ah, me! can it be true, as I have heard
From some bold mouth, that the bent sons of toil,
Hard-housed, hard-clad, hard-fed, hard-wrought, hard-
laid,

Do more of real happiness enjoy
In their short gleams of freedom and repose,
Than they whose sides indent the eider-down?
Do moderate wishes, simple natural tastes,
A grateful spirit, and a useful sphere
(Useful, but happier, if lowly too),
Dwell in an atmosphere more glad, more pure,
More soul-invigorating than surrounds .
The throne, where ease luxurious either lulls
To nerveless languishment, or passions rouse
To suicidal liberty, or fear
Begotten of danger hidden or perceived,
Haunts like a spectre with a bloodied hand?
It may or may not be. What if it is?
There is at least in Shushan at this hour
None more uneasy than the king himself.

Behold the stars, that on the leftward edge
Of earth's domed ceiling rose upon the view,
Soon as the luminous ruler of the world
Withdrew from sight, have all but measured out
The Magian's holy watch, and, to his point
Of morning revelation to mankind,
The bright god hath again transferred himself,
(Unfollowed in that act by mortal step),
And soon he'll cheer our grateful hearts again
With his full glory, as these dubious streaks
Of dawning light attest ; yet sleep hath failed,
Through all that black, slow-footed march of night,
Even for the moiety of one half-hour,
In her allegiance to the weary brows
That bear the golden load of Persia's crown.

All are asleep but me. The very guards,
My ear detects it, in the land of dreams
Are roaming free. I'll summon instantly
The chamberlain in turn, and bid him tell
Ezra the scribe to bring to me and read
The book of records of the Chronicles.
A strange desire has shot into my mind
To hear it read, perhaps 'twill soothe my brain.

[Summons the chamberlain.]

[Addressing the Chamberlain.]

Call Ezra, the young scribe, and bid him bring
The book of records of the Chronicles.

[The king resumes his couch.]

[Enter EZRA.]

AHASUERUS.

Read to me, Ezra, from the Chronicles.
Sleep hath been stranger to my couch all night,
And now the morn is faintly breaking. Read.

EZRA.

Persia hath stored in never-dying rolls
Her history. What wouldst thou have me choose,
O king, in this wide field?

AHASUERUS.

Read where thou wilt, or rather where thine eye
First falls. Begin.

[EZRA opens the book at random, and reads.

“In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king’s gate, two of the king’s chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen, and Esther certified the king thereof, in Mordecai’s name. And when inquisition was made of the matter it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree.”

AHASUERUS.

What dignity and honour hath been done
To Mordecai for this?

CHAMBERLAIN.

Nothing is done,

O king, for him.

AHASUERUS.

Who may be in the court?

CHAMBERLAIN.

Haman is come into the outward court.

AHASUERUS.

Haman; 'tis well. Bid him come forthwith in.

[Enter HAMAN.]

[*King addressing Haman.*]

What, Haman, shall be done unto the man
To honour whom the king doth take delight?

HAMAN *aside*.

To honour whom the king doth take delight!
Why, what man should the king more than myself
Delight to honour? 'Tis on me the king
Hath set his eye. It can be but on me.
Haman is great. Baal, give words.

[*Addressing the King.*]

O king,

To him, to honour whom the king delights,
Let the apparel royal which the king

Useth to wear be brought, likewise the horse
That the king rides upon, and the crown royal
Which is set on his head, and let this horse
And the apparel be delivered
Into the hands of some of the king's
Most noble princes, that he may array
Him whom the king to honour doth delight,
And bring him through the city's chiefest street
On horseback, and before him still proclaim,—
"Thus shall it even be done unto the man
To honour whom the king doth take delight!"

AHASUERUS.

Then, Haman, make thou haste and take the apparel,
Likewise the horse as thou hast said, and do
Even so to Mordecai the Jew that sits
At the king's gate. Let nothing fail of all
That thou hast spoken.

[Exeunt KING and HAMAN in opposite directions.]

CHAMBERLAIN.

Who could have dreamed?
Haman hath got a piece of work to do
Will try his haughty stomach. It is good!

EZRA.

Marked you his countenance at the king's command?
I could have roared. Well, pride hath gotten a fall.
Let us go see the sight, the vizier,—groom
And herald too,—to Mordecai the Jew! *[Exeunt.]*

SCENE II.—A ROOM IN HAMAN'S HOUSE.

Present: ZERESH, two of the MAGI, or wise men, and other friends.

Enter HAMAN hurriedly, and with his head covered.

ZERESH.

Why home at this strange hour, and in such case,
Mourning with covered head? Why, why is this?

HAMAN.

Who are all here? Zeresh, my friends, see I?
Why from the palace here do you inquire,
Mourning with covered head? Do you not know?
Have not these shouts of cursing and saluting
Pierced these thin walls? Is there an inch of space
In Shushan which these cursed shouts have failed
To fill and shake? You know it, know it all!
I see it in your faces. You mock too,
But with a difference. Ha! are not your looks
Disguised by seeming wonderment and fear,
Kin with the cursed laughter of the crowd?
Out, out upon you all and every one!
Out, out!——But I do rave. Forgive me, wife,
Forgive me, friends. I will the whole rehearse.
I will, as memory tossed by the maddening wrath
Which the remembered scene kindles afresh,
Kindles to be extinguished but by blood,
Rehearse the whole. Yes! I'll rehearse the whole.

That Mordecai ! that damned Mordecai !
That meek-mouthed, deep, designing, moveless Jew,
That hell's-hound, sitting at the palace gate,
And hath been there for long, and is there still
To frighten my entering in and going out,
To turn my sweet cup into wormwood, gall,
'Twas he, 'tis he ! The king ! !——Is it a dream
Midst which I labour ! Is the deep hot hell
Of degradation through which I have been dragged,
But torture shaped from unsubstantial air,
Which, gone, will leave a paradise behind ?
Ha ! ha ! But let me think——

ZERESH.

Husband, be calm;
What words are these ? We do not know of this.
Speak plainly. Has Parshandatha been slain ?
The Jew,—the king,—uproar upon the streets !
We heard no shouts.

A FRIEND.

Nor anything know we.
Why should we mock ? The vizier's arm is strong,
Strong as his seat——

HAMAN.

Stay, stay ; no more of this !
I am more calm. I see you all around.
I am at home. Say, am I not at home ?

Then listen.—In the full blaze of the sun
Which yesterday shone on me, I went forth
To the palace early,—the contemptuous Jew
Within my clutch, choked fifty cubits high
In Shushan's gaze, saving the simple word
But to be spoken,—O king, give Mordecai
Into my hand,—when in the outward court
Arrived and standing, I at once was called
By the chamberlain to come in to the king,
Who with bland voice said thus,—What shall be done
Unto the man to honour whom the king
Doth take delight?

ZERESH.

I warrant you did name
With commendation Mordecai. Ha! ha!
You had a golden chance,—

HAMAN.

Wife, speak not thus.
Taunted on every hand! Name Mordecai!
May Baal's curse blast you and all your seed
With every Jew!

ZERESH.

Husband, what means your wrath
You do mistake. The golden chance was this,—
Yourself to name, for, who in worth with you
In the king's thought, if justice rules men's minds,
Could be compared?

HAMAN.

Zeresh, I see it now.

You mean not all. You think as I did think.
And thinking so, I answered,—For the man
To honour whom the king doth take delight,
Let the apparel royal which the king
Useth to wear be brought, likewise the horse
Which the king rides upon, and the royal crown
Which is set on his head, and let the horse
And this apparel be delivered
Into the hand of some one of the king's
Most noble princes, that he may array
Him whom the king to honour doth delight,
And bring him through the city's chiefest street
On horseback, and before him still proclaim,—
“Thus shall it even be done unto the man
To honour whom the king doth take delight.”

ZERESH AND FRIENDS.

The proper answer !

HAMAN.

Ah ! what think you now ?

The king said,—Haman, then make haste and take
The apparel and horse, and do as thou hast said
Even so, to Mordecai the Jew that sits
At the king's gate ; let nothing fail of all
That thou hast spoken.

ALL.

To Mordecai the Jew !

HAMAN.

To Mordecai the Jew ! To Mordecai !

Come near me, wife and friends, nearer, and list ;
By thee, O Baal, I do swear, the king
Shall, in his heart's blood, rue this hell-born plot
Ere Haman leaves the earth.

ZERESH.

We hear thy oath ;
'Tis deep, so be it true. But bide thy time.
What didst thou when the king had given command ?

HAMAN.

With the best grace I could, smothering my wrath
Till the ripe hour, I led the cursed Jew,
Arrayed, as told, on horseback through the streets
To the great square, proclaiming the loathed words,—
“ Thus shall it even be done unto the man
To honour whom the king doth take delight ;”
While all along the route around me flew
Curses and salutations mingled so,
That I knew not my feet touching the ground
As I moved on. I could have murdered him
For not being proud. Nay, after all, he sneaked
Back to his old post at the gate of the king,
I hurrying home.

A FRIEND.

This bodes no good, I fear.

HAMAN.

Oh, say not so. Must all my sky grow black
In one short hour? Why shrink ye all from me?
Have ye no tongue to say,—Haman, be calm,
Be strong, and victory will crown you yet?
Ye Magi, who, even in the leaf of fate,
Can spy the fruit, what say ye? Speak one word
Of strength to Haman. Say,—the cursed Jew,
With all his race shall fall, and in his fall
Shake even the throne, but Haman's feet shall stand
Firm on the wreck. Speak ye, but speak this word,
And, by the pregnant stars ye love to watch,
Haman, like to a giant wine-refreshed,
Will rush into the tempest that hath burst
Around his head, and frown it into peace,
Snatching for you and yours a plenteous spoil.
Will you not speak the word?

THE MAGI, *solemnly*.

If Mordecai

Be of the seed of the Jews, before whom now
Thou hast begun to fall, then shalt thou not
Prevail against him, but shalt surely fall.

HAMAN.

Oh, say not so! Oh, say not so!

ZERESH.

 It must. It must.
Thou hast begun to fall. Thou'lt fall, thou'lt fall
Before the Jew.

HAMAN.

I am deserted now!!

[*Enter a servant.*

SERVANT.

The chamberlain of the king standeth without.

HAMAN, *with effort.*

Let him come in. (*Aside.*) Before the chamberlain
I must be calm and bold. [Enter HARBONA.

HAMAN, *addressing the Chamberlain.*

Well, what is it?

HARBONA.

That to the banquet by the queen prepared
You haste to come.

HAMAN.

I will be there anon. [Exeunt.

SCENE III.—THE QUEEN'S BANQUETING ROOM.

KING, QUEEN, HAMAN, *and* CHAMBERLAIN.

AHASUERUS.

Esther, thy second banquet doth surpass
Thy first in the delight with which I come,
Your loyal guest. But, Haman, what doth press,
That on your countenance there rests a cloud ?
You did my will in honouring Mordecai,
Whose name in Persia's history stands renowned,
But not rewarded fully till to-day,
And now the queen honours the king and thee
With a second banquet by her hands prepared.

HAMAN *aside*.

I must feign joy at mention of the Jew.
The queen too favours him. Let me be glad
In word and countenance, be really glad,
Though he escapes my panting clutch just now;
For, when the thirteenth day of Adar comes,
Shall he not then, and every Jew with him
Throughout the empire, fall into the gulf
Of my unquenchable, unbarriered wrath ?
The king's decree can never be recalled.

But on my heart I feel a death-like weight
I have not strength, I fear, to toss aside.
O Baal! shrivel with thy hottest curse

Her mouth and theirs who said,—“ If Mordecai
Be of the seed of the Jews, before whom now
Thou hast begun to fall, then shalt thou not
Prevail against him, but shalt surely fall.”

[*Addressing the King and Queen.*]

My lord, O king, if on my outward face
Joy's ripple dances not, then doth my face
Belie my heart, for Haman's cup is full,
Since with the king no man but him is called
By the queen to the banquet twice. Most gracious
queen,
Thou hast heaped on me joy and happiness
So great, so novel, that their subtle play
Drinks up my heart within, leaving my cheek,
For very envy's sake, to pale and frown.

AHASUERUS.

Haman, the wine-cup raise, and as we take
The wine the queen hath mingled, let us say
In heart,—Long live the queen !

HAMAN.

Long live the queen !
Long live the king and queen !

AHASUERUS.

Now, Esther, say
What the petition that thou wouldst prefer,

And it shall granted be to thee ; and what
Is thy request, and it shall be performed,
Even to the half of my kingdom ?—freely say.

ESTHER *aside*.

Jehovah, give me words, and so dispose
The king's heart, that he grant me all my prayer.

[*Addressing the king*

My lord, O king, if I have favour found
In thy sight truly, and if it please the king,
At my petition let my life be given
Me, and at my request my people too,
For we are sold, I and my people sold,
Given up to be destroyed, and to be slain
And perish all. But if we had been sold
For bondsmen and bondswomen, I had held
My tongue, albeit the wicked enemy could
Not countervail the damage to the king.

AHASUERUS.

Who is the man, and where is he that durst
In his heart presume to do so ?

ESTHER, *pointing to* HAMAN.

The adversary and the enemy is,
This wicked Haman !

AHASUERUS.

Haman !!

ESTHER.

This Haman !!

(The king starts up, scowls upon Haman, and retires in wrath to the palace garden.)

HAMAN, *addressing the Queen.*

O, Esther, pardon me ! O, gracious queen,
Pardon me, pardon ! Give me word of hope.
Speak to the king for me. Avert his wrath.
I blindly have offended. Wilt thou not
Obey thy heart, which only can be kind ?
By wicked counsel I was led astray.
Malicious tongues dropped poison in my ear
Touching the Jewish people. I believed
In weak simplicity. So that decree
Was not by me obtained, but through my fault,
Fault I confess, of childlike passiveness
Obtained by those who rather sought my fall,
My ruin, than the ruin of the Jews.
The king hath been deceived along with me.
Say so to him, that his most righteous wrath
Light on the guilty, not on the innocent.
Thou art all-powerful with the king. O speak,
That on my head the lightning do not break.
I knew thee not and Mordecai as Jews.
I hate not Mordecai. I did delight
This morn to honour him through Shushan's street.
I love the Jewish people. I would give
My life to further them, now that the veil

Woven by designing hands has been removed
From my repentant eyes. Thou pitiest me ;
Say, say thou wilt forgive ! Thou dost forgive.
Thou canst not seek a life devote to thee
And to thy kin. By thy most tender heart
I thee entreat. O, Esther, Esther, save !
Here at thy feet I fall, thy slave for life.
Look on me tenderly,— [Enter the king.

AHASUERUS.

What, will he force
The queen before me also in the house ?
[The chamberlains rush forward and cover Haman's face.

HARBONA, addressing the King.

Behold the gallows fifty cubits high
Which Haman had for Mordecai prepared,
Who for the king's behalf had spoken good,
Standeth in Haman's house.

AHASUERUS.

Hang him thereon !
[Exeunt king and queen.

(Executioners seize Haman to drag him away.)

HAMAN, with stifled voice.

Mercy ! mercy ! mercy !

ALL *cry out.*

No mercy to the merciless! No mercy!
To his own gallows with him!

[Haman is dragged away.]

HARBONA.

In the net which the wicked hid
Is his own foot taken!

ACT V.

SCENE I.—ANOTHER CHAMBER IN THE WOMEN'S HOUSE.

KING, QUEEN, CHAMBERLAINS.

KING.

The house of Haman, the Jews' enemy,
Because he hath immoderately abused
The honour he had from the king, I give,
Esther, beloved, to thee this happy day.
And now, for Mordecai what must be done?

QUEEN.

Even till this hour prudence hath held my tongue
From speaking to the king of Mordecai.
He is my uncle's son, and when death's hand
Deprived me of my parents in the years
Of helpless infancy, he took me home,
And was to me in stead of parents both,
Nay, surely more to me than parents both;
And hath been ever wise and kind and true
To me, O king! Within thy realms I know
There doth not breathe a loyaller heart than his——

KING.

Enough, beloved ! Harbona, haste and call
The faithful Mordecai. Say, that the king
Desires his presence. [*Exit* HARBONA.]

KING *continues.*

Esther, compose thyself;
The scene just past hath from thy lovely cheek
Frightened the rose, and given to Shushan's flower,
The lily pale, the unquestioned mastery.
This day will be to thee and to thy kin
The day of days.

[*Enter* MORDECAI.]

KING.

Art thou the Mordecai
Whom Esther's gratitude so highly rates,
And mine, for service done in the affair
Of Bigthana and Teresh ?

MORDECAI.

May the God
Of heaven and earth, the living and the true,
Ahasuerus bless for evermore !
Thy servant is the man.

[*ESTHER, rushing forward, embraces* MORDECAI.]

ESTHER.

My lord, O king !

Forgive, forgive ! 'Tis years since I have looked
So near upon the face of Mordecai ;
Now all my nature wells up in a tide
Of tenderest feeling that he there doth stand
Before me, and with thy kind countenance
Beaming upon him too.

MORDECAI, *embracing* ESTHER.

Hadassah child !

O Thou, Almighty God, who in the heavens
Sittest and rulest all in heaven and earth,
My cup hath not capacity to hold
The bliss which Thou art pouring into it now !

KING.

May that great God ne'er stint the happiness
Of both your faithful hearts, so prays the king.

Now, Mordecai, wear this the royal ring,
The ring of highest office under me,
From wicked Haman taken, and let all
My subjects honour thee. This my decree
Be forthwith published !

MORDECAI, *kneeling*.

Humbly I accept

The ring of highest office under thee,
O gracious king ! And, looking to my God

For strength and wisdom, will, the precious load
Of Persia's welfare, carry higher still,
If He so wills it.

QUEEN, *addressing* MORDECAI.

Over Haman's house,
His lands, his treasures, given to me of the king,
I do thee set, my faithful friend, this day.
[*The queen turns and falls down before the king.*]

QUEEN.

But O, my lord and king, regard my tears ;
Let me again make my request to thee.
The enemy of the Jews has been removed,
But not the mischief which he has devised .
Against the Jews.

(*The king holding out the golden sceptre, the queen
rises and touches it.*)

QUEEN *continues.*

If it do please the king,
And in his sight if I have favour found,
And if the thing seem right unto the king,
And I be pleasing still in the king's eyes,—
Let it be written straight that they reverse
The letter by Hammedatha's vile son,
Haman devised, which he wrote to destroy
The Jews in all the provinces of the king ;
For how can I the evil bear to see

That shall come on my people,—how endure
To look on the destruction of my kin?

KING.

Behold, Queen Esther, I have given to thee
The house of Haman, and him have they hanged
Upon the gallows, for he on the Jews
Did lay his hands. Now do ye also write
Even as it liketh you, and with my ring
Seal it; for what is written in my name
And with the king's ring sealed, none may reverse;
So do thou, Mordecai, in the king's name
Draw up an opposite decree from that
By Haman framed, empowering all the Jews
In every city of all the provinces
To stand on their defence, and to destroy
Their enemies all, who on the thirteenth day
Of Adar would assault them, little ones
And women both, and of them for a prey
To take the spoil.

ESTHER.

O, my most gracious lord,
My heart o'erflows with gratitude so great
I cannot speak it forth. But I can pray
My God to bless and keep, who hath your heart
To favour me and grant my prayer, turned.

MORDECAI.

O mighty king, thy merciful decree
Will be to every Jew life from the dead.
Me it becomes not to say more. My life,
How long soever spared, will speak for me.
Now if it please thee, let me urge the scribes
That, without loss of even a single hour,
Copies of this decree be written and sent
By posts on mules and camels hastened on
By the king's command to all the provinces.

KING.

Go! This is even my will!

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—THE GREAT SQUARE IN SHUSHAN.

(*A promiscuous crowd assembled. The chief magistrate and the town clerk and other officials appear on the steps of the City Court-House.*)

CHIEF MAGISTRATE.

If't please you, friends and citizens, be still,
That all may hear the king's decree proclaimed.

The Town Clerk reads:—“Many men there are who,
on account of the greatness of the benefits bestowed
on them, and because of the honour which they have

obtained from the wonderful kind treatment of those that bestowed it, are not only injurious to their inferiors, but do not scruple to do evil to those that have been their benefactors. This hath been the case of Haman, the son of Hammedatha, by birth an Amalekite and alien from the blood of the Persians, who, when he partook of that kindness which we bear to all men to so great a degree as to be called my father, could not bear his good fortune, nor govern the magnitude of his prosperity with sound reason; nay, he made a conspiracy against me, by endeavouring to take away Mordecai my benefactor, and treacherously to have Esther, the partner of my life and of my dominion, with the whole Jewish people, brought to destruction. But since I perceived that these Jews were not wicked men, but conducted their life after the best manner, I not only free them from the punishment which the former epistle, which was sent by Haman, ordered to be inflicted on them, (to which epistle if ye refuse obedience ye shall do well) but I will that they have all honour paid them. Accordingly, I have hanged up the man that contrived such things against them, before the gates of Shushan. And I give you in charge, that you publicly propose a copy of this epistle through all my kingdom, that the Jews may be permitted to use their own laws, and that you assist them, that at the same season whereto their miserable estate did belong, they may defend themselves the very same day from unjust violence,

the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is Adar, for God hath made that day a day of salvation instead of a day of destruction to them. Therefore, let this epistle be published through all the country which is under our obedience, and let all the Jews, by all means, be ready against the day before mentioned, that they may avenge themselves upon their enemies." Long live the king.

THE CROWD.

Long live the king! Long live the king and queen! Long live Mordecai! Long live the Jews! Down with the Amalekites! Down with the traitors! Down with the Hamanites!! [Exeunt.

SCENE III.—THE JEWISH MEETING PLACE.

Assembled:—SERAIAH, an aged priest, and a large company of Jews, both male and female.

SERAIAH.

We here convene at Mordecai's request.

[*Acclamations heard in the distance.*

Hark to those shouts of joy. He comes even now.
Shushan rejoices and is glad to-day,
Because the cloud that overhung the Jews
Hath been dispelled, and every Jewish home

Within her walls is filled with gladsome light.
The enemy is fallen, not by the skill
And strength of man, but by the Lord's own hand.

[*Enter MORDECAI arrayed in the robes of his new office.*]

THE WHOLE ASSEMBLY.

The Lord bless Mordecai ! bless Mordecai !
Our Moses of this day ! and bless the queen
Esther, our sister, who, of God's free grace,
Turned the king's heart to smite the enemy,
And give enlargement to the chosen seed !!

MORDECAI.

To God, to God alone, be all the praise !
Praise ye the Lord !

SERAIAH.

Come, let us praise the Lord !

They all sing.

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side,—
O let Israel say ;
If it had not been the Lord who was on our side ;
when men rose up against us :
Then they had swallowed us up quick,
when their wrath was kindled against us :
'Then the waters had overwhelmed us,
the stream had gone over our soul ;
'Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.

Blessed be the Lord,—who hath not given us as a
prey to their teeth,
Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the
fowler:

The snare is broken and we are escaped.
Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

Praise ye the Lord.
Sing unto the Lord a new song,
and his praise in the congregation of saints.
Let Israel rejoice in him that made him:
Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.
Let them praise his name in the dance;
Let them sing praises unto him with timbrel and harp,
For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people;
He will beautify the meek with salvation.

Let the saints be joyful in glory:
let them sing aloud upon their beds.
Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,
And a two-edged sword in their hand;
To execute vengeance upon the heathen,
and punishment upon the people;
To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles
with fetters of iron,
To execute upon them the judgment written:
this honour have all the saints.
Praise ye the Lord.

SERAIAH.

Now let us send our cry unto the Lord
In thankful, penitential, trustful prayer.

[*They kneel,—SERAIAH remains standing.*]

SERAIAH.

O God of Abraham ! Our fathers' God !
Who didst deliver in the days of old
Thy chosen flock, and us their seed to-day
Who hast delivered from the lion's mouth
In such wise that the heathen bless Thy name
As their deliverer who trust in Thee,
We bless and praise Thy name, we thank and bless.
Married to Thee, adulterers we have been,
Giving to idols what were due to Thee
And Thee alone, worship and trust and love.
O humble us, and humble more and more
For our ingratitude, our wickedness.
Yet Thou hast us delivered ! The enemy's bow
And shield and battle are in pieces broken,
Broken for us ; we wonder and adore.
O not for us, O not for us, O God,
Hast Thou so done, but for the sake of Him,
The Seed, the Son, the Branch, which for Thyself
Thou hast made strong. Still for Thine own name's
sake
Us bless and save, and we shall saved be.
Safe we are only, when to Thy great name,
In saving us, Thou hast respect. O look,

Never on us, but see, O God, our shield,
And on the face of Thine anointed look!
A present help Thou art in troublous time;
O may we ever put our trust in Thee.
As Thou hast snatched our soul from death, when
comes

The day by the wicked adversary fixed,
By lot drawn forth before his idol-god
For our destruction, save us, save us, then,
And break the teeth of the young lions all.

And, Lord, hear once again our ceaseless cry,—
Gather, O gather soon, if so Thy will,
All the dispersed of Israel into one
In their own land, around Thy Zion-hill!

Amen, amen, amen!!

[They all rise up.]

MORDECAI.

Amen, amen, amen, for evermore!
O may the prayer of faith for ever rise
From Israel's heart, so will the earth be blessed!
We are delivered. Like a dream the whole
Passes before our eyes. Our mouth is filled
With laughter, and our tongue with melody.
Haman the oppressor——

[The whole assembly clap their hands, and cry out.]

Let his name and memory be blotted out!!

MORDECAI *continues.*

Haman hath fallen
Into the pit which for the Jews he digged.
But yet the day in which our enemies hoped
To have the power o'er us, is not yet come.
But God who hath begun to save His flock
To-day, by casting down the arch-enemy,
Will save us then, giving us for a prey
All who have Amalek's blood within their veins.
That day of final triumph overpast,
Be it the same in city and in province,
Or not the same, as may be,—let the next
Succeeding them, oft, as the year comes round,
Be as the days observed wherein the Jews
Rested from all their enemies and had peace ;
Let them be days of feasting and of joy,
By sending portions one to the other friend,
And gifts unto the poor. And let those days
Be Purim called, for that the enemy,
Haman, cast Pur to know the very day
When he might have the Jews within his power
To slay them all, but when Queen Esther came
Before the king, the wicked plot was turned
On the enemy's own head, and the Jews had
The mastery that day. 'This the desire
Of Esther and myself.

ASSEMBLY.

This take we on ourselves
And on our seed. And may the God of heaven,
The God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac, Jacob,
Bless thee and Esther, and let Esther's seed
The throne of Persia, hold for Israel's good.

MORDECAI.

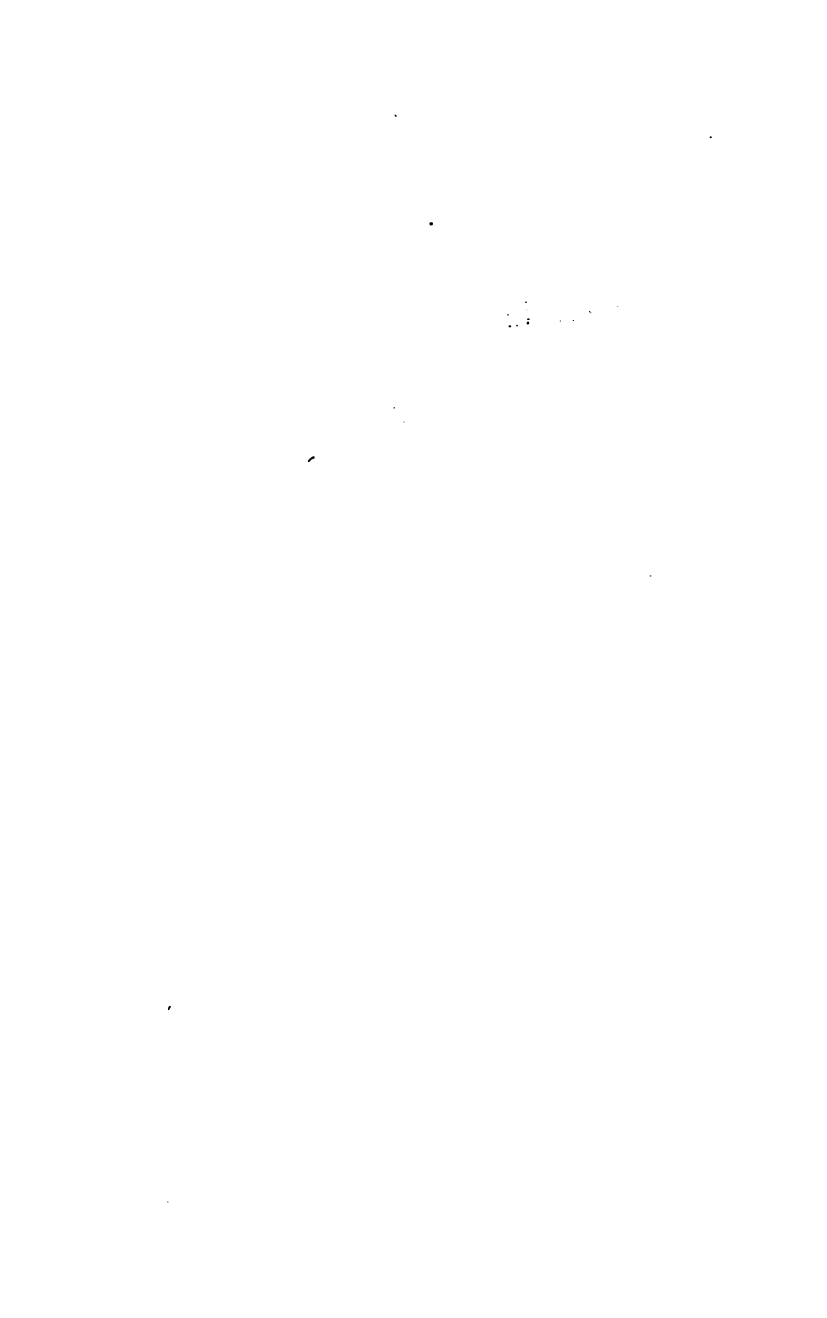
Amen ! Amen ! O might Jerusalem know
In Esther's son sitting on Persia's throne,
A king who, the dispersed of Israel,
By God's free grace, will gather into one.
God is our help and our deliverer
From henceforth and for aye !

While to our God, the living and the true,
We look in faith, our enemies shall rue
What time, in any age or any land,
Against the Jews they dare to lift the hand !!



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the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are undernourished has increased from 600 million to 800 million.

There are a number of reasons why the world's population is still hungry. First, the world's population is growing rapidly. In 1990, the world's population was 5.3 billion. By 2000, it had increased to 6.1 billion. By 2010, it is projected to reach 7.1 billion. This rapid population growth is putting increasing pressure on the world's food resources.

Second, the world's food resources are being used inefficiently. In many countries, a large proportion of the food that is produced is lost or wasted. For example, in the United States, it is estimated that 40% of the food that is produced is lost or wasted. This is a huge waste of resources.

Third, the world's food resources are being used inequity. In many countries, the food that is produced is not distributed evenly. Some people have access to food, while others do not. This is a major problem in many developing countries.

Fourth, the world's food resources are being used unsustainably. In many countries, the land that is used for food production is being degraded. This is due to a number of factors, including deforestation, soil erosion, and the use of pesticides and fertilizers.

Fifth, the world's food resources are being used in a way that is not taking into account the needs of the future. In many countries, the food that is produced is being used for short-term gains, without considering the long-term consequences.

There are a number of things that can be done to address the world's food problems. First, we need to reduce the world's population growth. This can be done by providing access to family planning services.

Second, we need to improve the efficiency of the world's food resources. This can be done by reducing food loss and waste, and by improving the way that food is distributed.

Third, we need to ensure that the world's food resources are used equitably. This can be done by ensuring that everyone has access to food, and by addressing the inequalities that exist in the world's food system.